

Speaking Points
Barbara Helfferich
Conference on More Safety for Existing Lifts in Europe
European Lift Association
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- I am delighted to be here, and I am particularly pleased that this conference is taking place during the European Year for People with Disabilities. This meeting is an important initiative, and is very much within the spirit of the European Year. Raising awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. And setting long-term goals to achieve concrete results for an accessible and inclusive society.
- Accessibility is an area that the Commission intends to improve and develop. We have come a long way since the publication of our policy Communication in 2000: "Towards a barrier-free Europe", but there is still scope for more progress. And the European Year provides an excellent opportunity to move forward in disability policy, especially in the area of accessibility.
- We need to continue removing the many barriers in our social environment. Helping to raise the quality of life of all disabled men and women across Europe.
- Access is the keyword. Access to buildings, to jobs, to education. Helping people with disabilities to live more independently. To work more easily, more comfortably and more productively. To travel. To train. To study. To get the most out of their free time.
- Accessibility is also part of a wider strategy on social and economic inclusion. Affecting every group in our society. For example, the elderly make up by far the largest proportion of people with disabilities in the EU and are also most likely to have restricted mobility. This is particularly relevant in view of Europe's ageing population.

- And accessibility includes access to information technology and to the Internet. Assistive technologies play a key role in including people with disabilities in our new knowledge-based society. It is estimated that in Europe the market for assistive technology is worth 10 billion euro and growing. The Commission intends to develop this area and will publish a report in 2003 with recommendations.
- Access to goods and services for everyone is vital. Although the standardisation of products and services is designed to meet market needs, it must also respond to issues of public concern. And access for all is clearly a public interest issue. Industry often argues that special needs are sufficiently taken into account when standardising goods and services. However, people with disabilities do not always share this view.
- This is because standardisation ultimately depends on the support of the business community. Not only in devising standards in response to the specific needs of people with disabilities, but also in fully implementing standards in a practical way.
- To ensure a more focused response to the specific needs of people with disabilities, dialogue with all stakeholders, at all levels, is crucial. Including the Social Partners. Including NGOs and disability organisations. And including people with disabilities themselves. But, this is not always easy to achieve. There is a lack of information on the potential role of standardisation in this field. And a lack of financial support.
- In this context, the European Year provides us with an excellent opportunity to strengthen the links with the European Standardisation Organisations (ESO), and to strengthen the commitment of the business community. I am very pleased to see that the ESO is currently holding a conference on accessibility, entitled 'Accessibility for All' as part of their contribution to the European Year.
- With respect to the commitment of the business community, the Corporate Social Responsibility initiative, recently announced by the Commissioner, and the Corporate Social

Participation initiative, that is now part of the Commission contribution to the European Year, should each provide a platform for future progress.

- But, perhaps of more immediate relevance to the subject of this conference is the question of accessibility to the built environment.
- Accessibility to the built environment means access to buildings. But, it is also about the relationship between buildings, and the open space between them. Accessibility is about creating an environment - both outside and inside buildings - that provides for easy access to all facilities for people with, or without, disabilities.
- And if accessibility needs are addressed at the design stage of a building, the costs of meeting the needs of those with disabilities are minimal. And there are economic and social advantages for everyone. Older people and single parents can enjoy easy access to buildings. Employers with accessible buildings can recruit from a wider pool of potential employees. And businesses whose buildings are accessible have a larger market for their products.
- This is where the work of the European Lift Association (ELA) is particularly valuable. Promoting the quality and safety of equipment and services related to elevators, freight lifts, escalators, passenger conveyors and associated systems that are manufactured, installed, or maintained, in the European Union. Serving the public interest in the safe, and uninterrupted, usage of such equipment.
- And I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the ELA on their work in this area. Particularly with respect to the needs of people with disabilities on issues such as restricted mobility, auditory and visual limitations and sensory deprivations.
- The ELA's manifesto is both ambitious and inspiring. It goes beyond ensuring the safety aspects of lifts. Addressing, very specifically, the needs of people with disabilities. It describes

the current position in new and existing buildings. Analysing the problem areas and making detailed recommendations for improvements.

- Among these recommendations is a call to the European Commission for a horizontal directive. Making lifts compulsory in all buildings. Eliminating the most severe risks, while modernising technology. Calling on the Member States to provide financial assistance for installation costs.
- And although I fully understand your concerns, the Commission must consider whether such a directive could succeed at this time. Member States currently have until the end of 2003 to implement the new directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation. And an important provision in the new directive is the requirement for employers to provide 'reasonable accommodation' for employees.
- This includes taking 'appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability to have access to, or advance in employment'. I believe we need to see how this Directive is implemented in the Member States before considering how best to take things forward.
- The Commission is also working hard in this area. We have set up an independent expert group on accessibility. Chaired by Mr Domenico Lenarduzzi, a former Director General of DG EAC, now retired, but who is very much respected in disability circles.
- We are particularly pleased that Mr Luc Rivet, General Secretary of ELA, is one of the expert members of this group, along with architects, building constructors, the Social Partners, and representatives of disability organisations. Mr Rivet's specialised expertise is extremely valuable to the work of this group.
- The group will report its findings later this year. Outlining recommendations for action either at national, or European, level. Feeding into our policy Communication on the follow-up to the European Year. Building on the achievements of the Year. Setting out a sustainable, and achievable, strategy beyond 2003.

- The good news is Member States are recognising that action, at national level, is crucial in the area of accessibility. For example:
- Since the year 2000, Belgium will only grant planning permission to apartment buildings that meet accessibility requirements for people with disabilities. And with respect to lifts, all public buildings must have a lift, or platform lift, that is adapted to the needs of people with reduced mobility.
- In Sweden, lifts are required in new buildings with three, or more, stories. And when an existing building is extended, or altered, legislation often requires the provision of lifts.
- Denmark has similar legislation. And I understand that new legislation is underway in the UK, France and Spain.
- However, accessibility is an issue that is not consistently defined across the Member States. And, on the basis of what we know already, much work remains to be done in this area. It is here where the recommendations of the expert group will contribute greatly towards identifying the real problems and developing practical, feasible solutions.
- Finally, it is important to remember that disability is a **rights** issue. And that having rights is one thing, but being able to exercise those rights is much more difficult. Mobility cannot be considered just as a convenience for, but as a fundamental right of, all European citizens.
- Accessibility to the built environment, in particular, is crucial. For employment opportunities. For social inclusion. And for independent living.
- This conference is a strong sign of the commitment of the European lifts Association to taking further positive steps to include all citizens in society. And represents a welcome opportunity for the Commission to hear more about current practice at national level. Thank you for your attention.

